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*Published in:*  
Journal of Education and Work

*DOI (link to publication from Publisher):*  
[10.1080/13639080701814414](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080701814414)

*Publication date:*  
2007

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Pedersen, L. T. (2007). Learning at trade vocational school and learning at work: boundary crossing in apprentices' everyday life. *Journal of Education and Work*, 20(5), 453–466.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080701814414>

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Publisher: Routledge

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## Journal of Education and Work

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713430545>

### Learning at trade vocational school and learning at work: boundary crossing in apprentices' everyday life

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Online Publication Date: 01 November 2007

To cite this Article: Tanggaard, Lene (2007) 'Learning at trade vocational school and learning at work: boundary crossing in apprentices' everyday life', Journal of Education and Work, 20:5, 453 - 466

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/13639080701814414

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13639080701814414>

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# Learning at trade vocational school and learning at work: boundary crossing in apprentices' everyday life

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This article argues in favour of a situated approach to understanding learning in practice at trade vocational school and at trade in vocational education. Boundary crossing is regarded as contributing to expansive situated learning by apprentices across trade vocational school and the trade. The purpose of the article is to show that the relationship between strangeness and legitimacy is central to situated learning across different contexts such as at trade and at trade vocational schools. The article draws on examples from a recent qualitative field study of learning among apprentices in the Danish vocational education sector.

**Keywords:** *Situated learning at trade vocational school and work; Boundary crossing*

## Introduction

One of the main characteristics of modern vocational education in Denmark is that learning at trade vocational school and at trade is combined in the process of educating apprentices. In principle, this allows for a combination of learning both at trade vocational school and at the workplace. Research in a Danish context shows that many apprentices both appreciate this possibility and complain of a lack of clear coordination and bridging from educational activities at trade vocational school to those in the trade (Wilbrandt, 2002, p. 41; Nielsen, 2005, p. 108ff.). Apprentices often experience trade vocational school and trade practice as very dissimilar contexts with different norms and guidelines for action. However, as analysed in this article, apprentices do not, per se, perceive any gap between theory and practice. Rather, the difference between participation at trade vocational school and participation at work

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concerns the seemingly conflicting emphasis on what makes theoretical sense at trade vocational school and what makes practical sense in the workplace. Among other things, there are also diverse cultures at trade vocational school versus at the workplace, which, in turn, cultivate different forms of participation, subjectivity and identity.

In this article, learning at trade vocational school versus at work in apprentices' everyday lives is therefore conceptualised as a matter of boundary crossing between different practices—and not as relating to gaps between theory and practice in an abstract, epistemological sense (see also Creek, 2006). The article addresses apprentices' experiences at trade vocational school and at the workplace, and the term *everyday life* is meant to address the everyday life of the apprentices in both trade vocational school and at the workplace.

### *Trade vocational school and trade as different social practices*

Recent socio-cultural and activity-theory approaches to learning and particularly the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) have led to an emphasis on learning in the workplace as part of the learning-research discourse. However, as argued by Hodkinson (2005), this has also frequently led to perceptions of trade vocational school-based learning as inferior and unsatisfactory. Yet, for many apprentices, the relationship between education and work remains important—the examination process at trade vocational school is, for example, part of the basis for subsequent higher wages and formal recognition in the workplace. In the light of the abovementioned objections to an isolated workplace learning discourse, this article argues for a conceptualisation of trade vocational school and work as different social practices. The argument is based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Lave's (1999) argument that not only apprenticeship situations, but also trade vocational school, is studied through an analytical departure in social practice. Therefore, in this article, dominant models of the relationship between trade vocational school and work are criticised for leading to inadequate assumptions with respect to the gaps between theory and practice. As an alternative, boundary crossing between practices forms the starting point for analysing learning in the everyday lives of apprentices.

### **Context and methods**

The examples drawn on in this article are from a field study which formed part of the author's recently completed doctoral work at Aalborg University, Denmark. The field study involved 10 male electro-mechanical apprentices with trainee service as part of an apprenticeship programme in a 100% Danish-owned industrial company located in a suburb to Aarhus, Jutland. I conducted 10 qualitative interviews and more than 100 hours of participant observations in the period between February 2001 and February 2002. The focus was on apprentices' everyday life and their experience of being part of vocational training.

The company employs a total of 1100 people with 1000 employees located in Denmark and 100 employees in other European countries. An average of three or four recently hired electro-mechanical apprentices and 10 more experienced electro-mechanical apprentices work at the company each year. Vocational training in Denmark last four years and the apprentices are guaranteed full training through a formal contract with a company. As one element of their education, they attend trade vocational school for five periods, each lasting between 5 and 10 weeks. However, there is a first period of elementary trade vocational schooling (from 20 to 60 weeks in total), where they receive funding from the State as students do in other kinds of further education in Denmark after the age of 18. After this initial trade vocational schooling period, they are employed in companies and receive a wage from the company, also while attending trade vocational school.

### **Theoretical background—three models of transitions between trade vocational school and work**

#### *A cognitive-functionalistic model of application*

The application approach to understanding the transition from trade vocational school to trade practice in vocational education is the most frequently embraced model in the context of combining trade vocational school and work. The model is based on cognitive-functionalistic models of learning in which the concept of knowledge transfer from trade vocational school to practical contexts of application is central (Anderson *et al.*, 2000). The argument is essentially that abstract instruction can be very efficient: 'Learning need not be bound to the specific situation of its application. Instruction can often generalize from the classroom to "real world situations"' (op. cit., p. 18).

In relation to this model, trade vocational school teaches the student general and specific theory which is supposed to be learned and then applied in contexts beyond the trade vocational school.

#### *The individual learner*

The cognitive-functionalistic perspective focuses on the individual, and learning is understood as resulting both in and from the processing of information in an individual brain. The suggestion is that the individual 'carries' the connection between the contexts of instruction at trade vocational school and those of application in everyday (practical) life. According to Lave (1999), learning is primarily perceived as a mental process allowing the individual to transfer knowledge from trade vocational school to problem-solving in everyday life. In this respect, trade vocational school is a teaching context and trade practice is an application context. The concept of knowledge is that it can be transferred to the individual through being instrumental, verbal and based on exact principles and explicit rules. The model has, among other things, spun off debate as to why people often fail to transfer knowledge taught at school and into practical life (see Lave, 1988).

*The problem with transfer between contexts*

In the application model, it is seldom discussed how the appropriation of knowledge at trade vocational school is influenced by, changed or revised within the context of knowledge application. Knowledge is seen as uninfluenced by application. General knowledge is only made specific through transfer. As a concept, transfer implies the degree of reproduction of knowledge or behaviour across contexts or situations (Detterman, 1993, p. 4). In a review of influential experiments in the twentieth century in which transfer was considered important, Detterman (1993, p. 15) concluded that the studies dealing with transfer involved a number of indications allowing the research subjects to transfer knowledge or problem-solving mechanics from one situation to another. In those situations in which knowledge transfer across situations was proven, the research subjects were encouraged or asked directly to apply problem-solving strategies from one situation to another. Transfer does not appear to be unproblematic and the concept of one form of (general) knowledge being unaffected by transfer seems questionable.

*The reflective practicum as the solution to problems of transitions*

Reflection in and on actions has been proposed as the solution to transfer problems across contexts of education and the workplace. Schön (1987) has been one of the prominent figures in the critique of the technical rationality underlying the application approach. He is critical of the conceptualisation of professional competence as the application of privileged, systematic and scientific knowledge taught at trade vocational schools and educational institutions. Schön developed the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-over-action in order to argue that professionals engage in reflection-on-action in situations of insecurity, conflict and breaks in the natural flow of professional action. Schön underlined how much professional action takes place in diffuse, unclear and 'muddy' situations which require qualified judgement by the professional with respect to which actions are appropriate and relevant. It is not meaningful to apply general and uniform knowledge to situations in the workplace which differ profoundly from one another and may require varying definitions and solutions to problems.

*Improvisation, testing and reflection*

The point of departure of Schön's model is that education directed at professions should combine teaching in a trade vocational school context with a reflective practicum design in which the students are taught the craftsman skills of reflection during work activities. In a practicum, the student learns through close supervision of his or her own work by a more experienced practitioner/teacher. The conception of the professional practitioner is changed by Schön from an instrumental problem-solver applying technical means to a reflective and phonetic practitioner. This idea of the reflective practitioner goes back to the Aristotelian distinction between two forms of

practical rationality—*scientific* rationality, by which we consider those things in our lives which cannot be changed and *practical* rationality with which we consider aspects of life which can be changed (Aristotle, 1976). The central point is that human action can be rational, without referring back to or having to be based on explicit, theoretical principles. It is, in fact, quite rational not to apply scientific rationality outside its own domain, because it does not prepare us effectively for situations which are changing and which could be different from what we know already.

Ideally, according to Schön (1987), both the student and the supervisor should be engaged in reflection in and on action. As the solution to transition problems, a model of reflection allows for a broad conception of knowledge in which implicit, tacit, pragmatic and local forms of knowledge are brought into the forefront (Kvale, 1993). The argument is that the inexplicable or tacit aspects of knowledge can alone be appropriated by participating in communities of practice in which these forms of knowledge are shared.

An emphasis on the reflective practicum as a solution to problems of transitions between knowledge at trade vocational school, and knowledge in professional practice, avoids the problematic distinctions between the appropriation and application of knowledge, but two major problems still exist.

### *A pseudo praxis*

One problem is that learning is still designed to take place in particular practices—in a kind of pseudo praxis (Schön, 1987, p. 37). Nobody really knows if the problems and possibilities of learning found in a reflective practicum will be the same problems as those found in the profession. A practicum will never prepare someone fully for the profession or rightly replace the trade practice of dual education. For example, the consequences of certain actions are probably never as harsh in a reflective practicum as in the profession where customers may object to the product sold and where this might have negative consequences for the employee (Tanggaard & Elmholdt, 2006). A practicum is an ideally constructed room, which is 'safe and sound' in its isolation from the many disturbing and problematic aspects of genuine practice. Schön's critique of technical rationality is relevant when developing educational design which adheres to developing the situational knowledge and skill of the practitioner, but does not explain how the apprentice is supposed to connect and make sense of his former trade vocational school activities in 'real world' situations. I will argue that we need a model conceptualising trade vocational school and the context of trade practice as being dissimilar practices, which do different kinds of work, have different values and are structured by different kinds of knowledge and power. In this respect, learning does not have to do with the transformation of theory into practice, but with gaining increasing familiarity with the objects, customs, traditions, values and people in the practices of the apprentice. To develop this point, I argue in the following section that boundary crossing and the dynamic of strangeness and legitimacy are central to understanding the participation of the apprentice across the trade vocational school and work contexts.



### Boundary crossing between trade vocational school and work contexts

The analytical departure of this article in the concept of boundary crossing is inspired by situated theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Lave, 1999), work in an activity-theory framework (Engeström, 2004) and the specific work on boundary objects by Bowker and Star (1999). The intention is to focus on the horizontal aspects of learning in the participation of the learner across social practices and to place 'a heavy emphasis on actions of bridging, boundary crossing, "knotworking", negotiation, exchange and trading' (Engeström, 2004, p. 16).

#### *Learning as an integrated aspect of social practice*

In this model, theoretical knowledge is not conceptualised as more privileged than other types of knowledge. Knowledge and learning are viewed as elements of social practices: 'the organization of schooling as an educational form is predicated on claims that knowledge can be de-contextualized, and yet schools themselves as social institutions and as places of learning constitute very specific contexts' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40). The knowledge taught at trade vocational school is seen as related to the specific context of the school and the idea of de-contextualised knowledge is therefore, in principle, impossible (see also Lave, 1988). We think of practice as mediated by the available means for thinking: tools, traditions of reasoning, artefacts, situational requirements and other people. The content and forms of thinking change, because situations and the requirements of our actions and participation in these situations change. No abstract thinking occurs outside some form of situation: 'What is called general knowledge is not privileged with respect to other "kinds" of knowledge. It too can be gained only in specific circumstances. And it too must be brought into play in specific circumstances' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 34). The basis of the argument is that reasoning and learning take place in every possible context and the objective is to describe and analyse local forms of learning and thinking as integrated aspects of social practice, rather than sticking to a possible dualism between contexts of learning and theory and contexts of not learning and practice (Dreier, 1999).

#### *Learning and membership*

From this viewpoint on social practice, we inhabit the world before we think about it reflectively. Social ontology is the starting point for inquiries into learning and *not* the abstracted notions of epistemology embraced in the cognitive-functionalistic perspective. People learn as they become members of what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as communities of practice or what Strauss (1978) calls social worlds. Put simply, a community of practice is a set of relations among people doing things together, cutting across formal organisations and institutions—and therefore, also potentially trade vocational schools and workplaces. Newcomers to the community learn by becoming a form of member during the process of legitimate peripheral participation (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 294). For example, one is not born a pianist, a psychologist or a



teacher but gradually becomes a member of the community of pianists, psychologists or teachers.

### *Boundary objects, familiarity and strangeness*

The concept of boundary objects is relevant in this context, because: 'Learning the ropes and rules of practice in any given community entails a series of encounters with the objects involved in the practice: tools, furniture, texts, and symbols, among others' (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 294). Learning involves an increasing familiarity with the objects and other people in the community. The field of tension between, for example, trade vocational school and the workplace can, therefore, be seen as entailing a relation between familiarity and strangeness. Accordingly, rather than viewing learning as a product to be transferred from one context to another, as argued by Hodkinson (2005), we need to see learning as an on-going relational and reconstructive process. What characterises the transition from trade vocational school to the workplace is not learning, but the learner who learns one thing at trade vocational school and something related, but rather different at work. This learning changes continually, is revised and combined in the person's encounters with different objects and within his or her participation across contexts. At stake for the learner, is becoming a member of certain communities of practice which often extend across different contexts and social practices. In this sense, learning is a matter of boundary crossing, negotiating the dynamics of strangeness and legitimacy, relating to and getting access to possible positions of identity in the community.

### **Empirical examples of boundary crossing**

Engeström (2001) has argued that much valuable learning involves horizontal development, that is, people learn because their existing practices are challenged by crossing boundaries into new situations. This is a significant stimulus for learning. Fuller and Unwin (2004) develop this concept by arguing that the opportunity to learn in a variety of locations results in a more expansive learning environment. From this perspective, crossing borders between trade vocational school and the workplace becomes a positive enhancement of learning as an emerging process (Hodkinson, 2005). This induces both richness and complexity into the learning process. Instead of studying learning in isolated contexts, the main theoretical and empirical concern is to study how people combine, modify and connect learning across places, and how, for example, they may replace earlier learning by something new. In everyday life, rather than transferring knowledge, people find ways to hold on to, modify and develop modes of learning. A few empirical examples are given below to illustrate this dynamic.

The empirical examples are selected from the interviews conducted with two apprentices: Anders and Bjarne. I interviewed Anders in March 2001 in a meeting room at the company in which he is being trained as an electro-mechanical apprentice. Before the interview, I had conducted participant observations of his work in the company for two weeks. Anders is presently 18 years old. He has just finished secondary school

and the first trade vocational school period at the local trade vocational school in Aarhus. I interviewed Bjarne in the office of the master (while the master was on holiday!) during October 2001. I had already conducted participant observations of his work for two weeks, and attended trade vocational school with him as well. Bjarne is 20 years old, and has completed high school. He has been doing vocational training for two years, and is the chairman of the local apprenticeship club at the company. However, although the focus is on two apprentices, the examples chosen also represent more general themes running across the interviews with the other eight apprentices who formed part of this overall study.

### *From pupil to adult positions*

To the apprentices in the study on apprenticeship learning drawn on in this article, participation across trade vocational school and the workplace provides a positive case for negotiating the differences between being a pupil at trade vocational school and becoming an adult in the workplace. In relation to a broad and situated conception of learning related to identity and becoming specific persons (Lave, 1999) this is an important case for the study of learning:

*Anders:* In trade practice, it's kind of an adult life. We talk about house prices, television programmes and having children. In high school, they only talk about girls and parties. Of course we still do that ourselves at trade vocational school, but we earn more money and leave home, and anyway, it's not just about money, I think we are becoming more mature.

*I:* What makes you say that you are becoming more mature?

*Anders:* Responsibility and trust, I think. Trust from others that we will do our jobs properly.

To Anders, trade practice gives him access to an adult life, with its discourses on television programmes, house prices and children, leaving home and earning more money. He is approaching the task of taking on an adult life identity, while he sees friends around him going to high school and still living the life of a pupil. The essential point is that the increasing familiarity with the objects and discourses of adult life, which is accessible to Anders only in the trade practice, contributes to a relevant widening of his participation in the community of electro-mechanics as an 'emerging adult'. However, he is also still a pupil at trade vocational school where he and his peers are embracing a youthful lifestyle. In this respect, it can be argued that apprentices are in some ways marginalised individuals. Marginality refers to human memberships in more than one community of practice. Apprentices have a dual perspective, by virtue of having more than one identity (both pupil and emerging adult) to deal with (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 302). Marginal strangers are those who come and stay a while, long enough so that membership becomes a troublesome issue—they are people 'who sort of belong and sort of don't'. On the one hand, as an apprentice, Anders becomes increasingly familiar with the objects and discourses at the workplace; on the other hand, he is not a full member, because his participation also remains anchored at trade vocational school. He is an insider-outsider who

begins to question the life of his peers at high school (and himself at trade vocational school) and, as yet, is only a legitimate peripheral participant in the workplace (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

### *Boundary crossing mediated by peer groups*

To many apprentices, peer groups at trade vocational school can function as a site for constructive dealing with crossing the boundary between trade vocational school and trade practice. At trade vocational school, peers often critically discuss and evaluate their respective experiences in the trade practice. They may, for example, find the courage to go back and ask their master to be given just as challenging tasks as their peers at other companies:

*Bjarne:* As pupils at trade vocational school, we work in the same field, and we talk to one another about being employed in the respective companies. We compare what we do and find out if the others do more interesting things—then one might go back to the trade vocational school surely and complain to one's master—it's like you find a reference, right.

The peer groups at trade vocational school function as a mediating meeting point in the interface between trade vocational school and work. These groups refer both to activities within the trade vocational school and beyond, and they become part of a communication infrastructure crossing from trade vocational school to the workplace. Related to the learning dynamic of strangeness and legitimacy, the other peers act as relatively familiar strangers in relation to each other. They challenge and inspire each other with their unlike perspectives and experiences from different trade practices. According to Bowker and Star (1999, p. 304), a peer group at trade vocational school becomes a 'borderland' for people who co-exist in different practices. For example, the peers help each other to destabilise unsuitable and non-constructive places for learning that they have each come to take for granted 'at home' in the trade practice. At least, each of them has the potential to become aware of what they should be gaining from their trade practice, when confronted with the views of their peers. As an empirical example, peer groups point to the potential of borderlands as mediators of participation between the social practices of trade vocational school and the trade practice.

### *The (de)valuation of trade vocational school*

As argued by Creek (2006), the notion of a theory/practice gap is often voiced as an instrumental notion of expediency and necessity in terms of the needs of specific workers and patterns of working simultaneously in different environments. Trade vocational school is viewed only as a contributor to workforce qualifications. In the workplace where I conducted participant observations, I often heard journeymen and apprentices talk somewhat negatively about trade vocational school. For example, they told me that general school subjects taught in trade vocational school cannot be applied directly in the workplace. To the apprentice, boundary crossing between trade vocational school and trade practice can be like crossing different cultures, with

different norms and values in relation to what is regarded as knowledge and good practice. In this respect, trade vocational school is often viewed as teaching subjects that are too abstract, while the meaning of learning at the workplace seems clearer to the apprentice:

*I:* How come you identify so strongly with the trade practice?

*Anders:* Well, it's just the way things are. You can see more clearly what things are important. I remember with many of my mates in secondary school, if we had to learn something in mathematics, lots of them refused to bother, because they could not identify with what we had to learn...why on earth do I need to learn about fractions? If the teacher did not have a clear answer, they gave up the work. Here, in the trade practice, you can always clearly see the meaning of what is going on. Sometimes at trade vocational school, I find it a bit harder, I must say.

To Anders, crossing the boundaries from secondary school to an apprenticeship position has made clearer what he needs to learn and why. Many apprentices identify with becoming journeymen and to them, this identification can easily become part of a refusal or ambivalence towards activities at trade vocational school. We do not know whether this is the case with Anders, nor is it wrong or a barrier to learning. Boundary crossing does not, per se, only have to do with continuity, stability and coherence in the participation of the apprentice. It may, in fact be quite constructive to disengage discursively from trade vocational school if one is trying to connect oneself to the workplace and the values at stake in this other practice. However, many of the journeymen at the workplace and the masters valued those apprentices who were doing well at trade vocational school. In one of the master's offices, copies of the journeymen's certificates for his best apprentices were hanging on the wall, and those who obtained the best grades at trade vocational school were often employed again after their apprenticeship. Many of them were encouraged to continue with their education at university which entailed the possibility of further boundary crossing, and, in Fuller and Unwin's (2004) terms, expansive learning across different communities of practice. Related to the central dynamic in learning of the strange and the familiar, Anders is reflecting on the seeming opaqueness of the institution of trade vocational schooling (strangeness) and, by contrast, the transparency in the workplace of what to learn (familiarity). To him, the familiarity and therefore transparency of the workplace provides a good case and environment for learning, which has also made him reflect on his own participation across the different practices of trade vocational school and work.

### *Combining and modifying learning across trade vocational school and work*

As the above analysis indicates, the relationship between trade vocational school and practice is not only a matter of applying theory to practice. Considerations of where to belong and with whom to identify—either seeing oneself as belonging to the workplace or as a person going into further education, seems to be important from the perspective of the apprentices. Nonetheless, it is not only a matter of either belonging to the workplace or not belonging. Many of the apprentices struggle to combine and modify their learning across trade vocational school and work:

*Anders:* I think it's an advantage to learn how things really work and not to stay in a theoretical world. To pretend you are doing something, like at trade vocational school, is okay, I think you can learn a lot from that, but I also think you can learn just as much from trying out how things actually work. It's a combination of both.

Anders seems to value both 'the pretending work' at trade vocational school and the 'learning by doing' approach of, respectively, the trade vocational school and trade practice. To an apprentice, encountering how things really work is not surprisingly, the more important of the two, but he also values the approach to problems at trade vocational school and the potentials of combining the insights gained in the different practices of trade vocational school and work. In the following, Bjarne elaborates on his own experience of the fruitful shifting between trade vocational school and work:

*I:* Can you tell me how you experienced shifting between vocational trade vocational school and trade practice?

*Bjarne:* It's like a break in everyday life. You feel like, now I'm going to trade vocational school to learn more and when you return, you are given a breathing space from the theoretical stuff and you may find out that well, I can't really manage this task, I must remember to ask at trade vocational school, if I can be given some tasks in this area.

I would argue that Bjarne's example is a case of expansive learning. His participation in trade practice makes him aware that he needs to learn more about certain subjects at trade vocational school. He is aware that he is dependent on mastering tasks in both practices so as to become a full participant in the community of electro-mechanics which cross the institutions of both trade vocational schooling and work. Of course, there are many more aspects to an expansive learning environment than becoming aware of the potential of trade vocational schooling to support the mastery of tasks. Fuller and Unwin (2004) identify a range of dimensions related to the continuum of expansive versus restrictive learning environments. Dimensions associated with an expansive learning environment include organisational recognition and support for employees as learners, the reification of 'workplace curricula', teamwork, innovation, multi-dimensional views of expertise, cross-boundary communication and a company vision of workplace learning. However, the main dimensions of expansive learning environments concern participation in multiple communities of practice within and beyond the workplace and the possibility of identity extension through boundary crossing. The examples given in this article support these more general ideas about expansive learning environments by arguing that the possibility of combining and modifying one's participation across practices is a central dynamic in learning for the person crossing these practices. However, always being a stranger and never really belonging anywhere does not facilitate a legitimate position which enables becoming familiar with and learning about the objects and people in particular practices. Too much boundary crossing may destabilise the participation of the apprentice, hindering the familiarisation required for learning. The following is an example of the process of becoming increasingly familiar with tools in the field as a condition for learning. Anders is telling his story of learning English:

*Anders:* All documentation is written in English. At trade vocational school, we had 20 weeks of English lessons. At first, I found it difficult. It was a totally boring way to learn English—it is when you do not think about it that you learn. Sitting in a classroom and learning English—it's just not my way. 20 weeks of technical English does not make me a world champignon, but now I am learning every day working with the manuals at the workplace.

Anders has found out that he needs to master English to become proficient at work. It is only through this mingling of English with his evolving identity as an electro-mechanic that he begins to master reading and understand English. The immediate strangeness of English is beginning to make sense to him—it is becoming familiar, because he can associate it with his changing identity as an electro-mechanic. He is, one could say, discovering the differences between something making theoretical as opposed to practical sense, in the context of trade vocational school and the workplace. To him, the transparency of goals and tasks in the workplace gives him access to learning English, combining what he learned at trade vocational school and what he is now learning every day.

## Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article was to argue in favour of a situated approach to understanding learning in the field of trade vocational school and trade practice in vocational education. In order to achieve this objective, the article elaborated on the work on situated learning by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Lave (1999) by combining it with the concept of boundary crossing (Engeström, 2001, 2004; Fuller & Unwin, 2004) and the dynamic of strangeness and legitimacy in learning inspired by the work of (Bowker & Star, 1999). Learning at trade vocational school versus learning at work in apprentices' everyday lives was conceptualised as the difference between practices, and not, per se, between abstract notions of 'theory and practice'. It was argued that dominant models of the relationship between trade vocational school and work (the cognitive-functionalistic model of learning (Anderson *et al.*, 2000) and the practicum concept developed by Schön (1987)) does not adequately conceptualise trade vocational school and the workplace, with each as specific places for learning. It was then argued that learning does not primarily involve the transfer of knowledge from trade vocational schools to practical contexts of application, but rather the process of gaining increasing familiarity with the objects and persons in and across different communities of practice. The field of tension between, for example, trade vocational school and the workplace was therefore seen as entailing a relationship between familiarity and strangeness. Boundary crossing between practices relates to negotiating this dynamic of strangeness, familiarity and legitimacy, relating to and gaining access to possible positions of identity in the community.

In the article, a few empirical examples were given to illustrate the potential of an analytical departure in boundary crossing related to the transition of the apprentice across trade vocational school and practice. In relation to a broad and situated conception of learning that is associated with identity and becoming a unique individual, the



transformation from being a pupil at trade vocational school to an adult position in the workplace, was taken as an initial, empirical point of departure. Peer groups were subsequently discussed as an example of how boundary crossings are mediated in everyday life. From the perspective of the apprentice, peer groups function as a communication infrastructure between trade vocational school and trade practice. Acting as strangers to each other in relation to experiences in trade practice, the apprentices can challenge and inspire themselves. The article also discussed how boundary crossing between trade vocational school and trade practice sometimes means that the apprentice discursively disengages from trade vocational school, because he needs to identify primarily with the trade practice.

The more general point is that boundary crossing does not, per se, only have to do with continuity, stability and coherence in participation. To be able to 'connect' to something (e.g. the workplace), the apprentice may need to disengage either discursively or practically from other places.

A potential criticism of the article is that the term 'boundary crossing' is just another word for the phenomenon of 'transfer'. However, as concepts, boundary crossing and the dynamic of strangeness and legitimacy refer to the participation of the apprentice across contexts. This entails much more than a rationalistic process of knowledge transfer or transformation. The aim is to show that what is also at stake in the learner's movement across practices are issues of identity formation and gaining access to widening personal and professional positions over time and in the future. Part of this involves combining and modifying learning, so as to be able to perform knowledgeable actions in the practices to which the apprentice will belong. Secondly, the intention is to show that trade vocational school and other practices, such as trade practice in vocational education, must be seen as different practices in their own right. Each practice cannot always be judged through the eyes of the other. From the perspective of apprentices, learning also concerns aspects other than those which a potential employer may find suitable or effective. Instrumental notions of learning are different from the more situated and existential aspects employed in this article. Of course, the argument is not that education will only be provider-led and inflexible in relation to 'consumers' in everyday life nor that learning is only to be seen as a self-centred enterprise (see also Biesta, 2005). Rather, from the perspective of this article, learning is about becoming a member of certain practices and gaining access to valuable learning, leading to a form of belonging to and being accepted into these practices. Much of this has to do with how the learner can deal with participation and cross boundaries and differences between practices with diverse values and traditions. That is why we need concepts other than the dominant ones provided in contextual, individualistic and rationalistic theories of learning across the institutions of trade vocational schooling and the workplace.

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